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AUTHOR Webb, James L.
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ABSTRACT

This study examined three issues dealing with the corporate wellness field: (1) What education, training, and competencies are important for success in the field? (2) What areas of professional prepration and training for wellness/fitness leadership are being emphasized in college/university programs? and (3) How closely aligned is university preparation with worksite wants? Two questionnaires and surveys were distributed to 50 corporate fitness program directors and 75 directors of undergraduate programs for adult fitness or corporate wellness to obtain information about attitudes regarding educational needs and competencies for corporate wellness professionals. Rankings of importance of competencies, preparation program content, and training program experience revealed that technical knowledge courses deemed important by fitness directors were taught in 70 percent of formal preparation programs. University training in the areas of general health knowledge was also meeting expectations of fitness directors. About 37 percent of the university programs indicated that they provided 300 to 599 hours (a time allotment deemed important by fitness directors) of on-the-job training. University programs in general tended to neglect to promote personal attributes in students deemed important by fitness directors. About 75 percent of fitness directors viewed certification by the American College of Sports Medicine as being requisite for job acquisition. (CB)

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FITNESS/WELLNESS SPECIALISTS:
CORPORATE WANTS vs. UNIVERSITY PREPARATION

James L. Webb, Ph.D.
Cal Poly State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

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INTRODUCTION

The need for qualified corporate fitness leaders is becoming increasingly important as more companies initiate wellness programs, and as the programs become more complex. The training, education, and competence levels of such personnel vary greatly ranging from graduate students with degrees in adult fitness/cardiac rehabilitation, to high-school dropouts that are hired for only their personal attributes. Opinions are varied and uncertain regarding the qualifications a corporate wellness program employee should possess, and standard criteria for hiring such professionals is virtually non-existant. The diversification of programs devised by the swelling number of colleges and universities assuming responsiblity for wellness leadership training is further witness to the confusion, and emphasizes the need for continuing study and refinement of academic curricula and experiences in this area.

Certainly a principal concern of all institutions with this focus must be whether or not their product is marketable. Are they preparing a graduate who will be readily received into the corporate wellness fold or one who will flounder professionally until deficiencies are remedied or until career choices are modified? Answers to this question can be clarified, in part, by examining worksite wants, ... by interviewing the practitioner. Ultimately in so doing, the institution gathers additional stability and direction for program evaluation.

It was these motives that prompted the present investigation. In its entirety the study was devised to examine three concerns:

1. What education, training, and competencies are deemed important by practitioners for success in the corporate wellness field?

2. What principle areas of professional preparation and training for wellness/fitness leadership are being emphasized in college/university programs?

3. How closely aligned is university preparation with worksite wants?

DATA COLLECTION

Data acquisition involved the utilization of two questionnaires and two surveys. One questionnaire was sent to 50 selected corporate fitness program directors who were currently members of the Association for Fitness in Business. This instrument, in addition to requesting demographic information, focused on two areas of inquiry. The first asked the directors to rate, on a scale of 0 to 4, components within each of five categories of study (technical knowledge, general health knowledge, business skills, internship experience, miscellaneous) with respect to degree of importance for success in the corporate fitness setting. An additional category, consisting of nine personal attributes, was evaluated in the same manner. Ratings were assigned as follows:

0 ... no importance
1 ... low importance
2 ... moderately important
3 ... important
4 ... extremely important

A second area of inquiry was explored and consisted of open-ended questions designed to obtain Program Director opinions regarding such things as certification, need for advanced degrees and business preparation background.

In a second survey, conducted in a like manner, data from college an university programs were obtained via a three part questionnaire similar in content and format to that devised for the corporate population. This instrument was mailed to 75 directors of selected programs currently offering undergraduate curriculi in some aspect of adult fitness and/or corporate/commercial wellness. Part I of the university questionnaire presented the same five categories and components of study surveyed in the corporate questionnaire. University representatives were asked to identify those courses, etc. offered at their institutions. Part II requested information about the nine personal attributes also surveyed on the corporate questionnaire. Did the university academic/advising/counseling program promote the development of personal attributes in their students and, if so, which ones? Finally, Part III used open-ended questions to examine opinion relating to the general preparation of students for work in a corporate fitness setting.

SCORING

Ratings of "importance" obtained from the corporate survey for each component in the academic and personal attributes categories were evaluated and mean values computed. In a similar manner, the mean percentage scores of university programs offering courses within the five academic areas investigated, and promoting the nine personal attributes examined were also calculated. To align the degree of importance placed by the corporate directors on possession of these various qualities and skills, with the incidence of offering or training provided by universities, a classification/weighting system was arbitrarily established. This system is a follows:

A MEAN CORPORATE "IMPORTANCE" SCORE OF:	WAS EQUIVALENT TO A MEAN UNIVERSITY PERCENTAGE OF:
0.00 - 0.99	0.00 - 24.99
1.00 - 1.99	25.00 - 49.99
2.00 - 2.99	50.00 - 74.99
3.00 - 3.99	75.00 - 99.99
4.00	100.00

FINDINGS

Of the 50 questionnaires sent to corporate fitness directors, 32 (64 percent) were completed and returned. Forty-one of the 75 questionnaires mailed to colleges and universities were also returned (55 percent). Mean corporate rating scores and mean percentages of universities offering courses and programs were examined for each of the six categories investigated to ascertain how well they were aligned. This information is presented in Tables 1-6 and Figures 1-6.

Table 1

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for Technical Knowledge Areas of Study

Area of Study	Fitness Director Rating (M ± S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
Exercise Prescription	3.87 ± .23	87.80
Emergency Procedures	3.87 ± .17	70.73
CPR Certification	3.84 ± .19	80.49
Exercise Physiology	3.81 ± .29	100.00
Fitness/Stress Testing	3.53 ± .31	85.37
Anatomy/Physiology	3.39 ± .34	92.68
Nutrition/Diet Modification	3.26 ± .25	97.56
Kinesiology	3.03 ± .18	85.37
Athletic Training/Rehab.	2.84 ± .30	85.37
Statistics	2.16 ± .35	68.29
Basic Electrocardiography	2.16 ± .34	75.61
Computer Science	2.08 ± .26	57.00
Biochemistry	1.50 ± .18	46.34

Table 2

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for General Health Knowledge Areas of Study

Area of Study	Fitness Director Rating ($\bar{M} \pm$ S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
Health Risk Appraisal	3.39 ± .18	82.93
Stress Management	2.93 ± .22	68.29
The Aging Process	2.80 ± .26	60.98
Smoking Risks/Cessation Tech.	2.64 ± .19	60.98
Alcohol/Drug Abuse	2.42 ± .21	48.78

Table 3

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for Business Skill Areas of Study

Area of Study	Fitness Director Rating ($\bar{M} \pm$ S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
Communication with Management	3.68 ± .12	36.58
Management Skills	3.45 ± .16	46.34
Purchasing of Equipment	3.13 ± .10	41.46
Budgeting	3.03 ± .18	39.02
Marketing	3.02 ± .21	41.46
Care/Maintenance of Equipment	2.90 ± .17	39.02
Business Administration	2.87 ± .13	31.71
General Office Skills	2.29 ± .24	19.51
Bookkeeping	2.03 ± .22	21.95
Accounting	1.97 ± .28	31.71

Table 4

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for Internships

Type of Internship	Fitness Director Rating ($\bar{M} \pm$ S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
300 hours to 599 hours	3.21 ± .41	37.21
600 hours to 900 hours	2.86 ± .52	13.95
100 hours to 299 hours	2.71 ± .47	23.25
More than 900 hours	1.94 ± .38	6.98
Less than 100 hours	1.89 ± .31	18.61

Table 5

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for Miscellaneous Areas of Study

Area of Study	Fitness Director Rating (M ± S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
Modern Conditioning Methods	3.67 ± .37	51.22
Recreation Programming	2.43 ± .20	26.83
Graphic Arts	1.92 ± .31	7.32
Typing	1.82 ± .26	0.00

Table 6

Corporate Fitness Director and University Rating Scores for Personal Attributes

Personal Attribute	Fitness Director Rating ($\bar{M} \pm$ S.D.)	Universities Offering Training (Percentage)
Enthusiasm	3.97 ± .08	75.00
Personal Appearance	3.92 ± .03	52.78
Ability to Work with People	3.92 ± .04	92.68
Interpersonal Communication	3.92 ± .03	58.33
Motivating	3.85 ± .07	69.44
Self-Confidence	3.76 ± .07	77.78
Patience	3.52 ± .11	50.00
Tolerance	3.52 ± .16	47.22
Extroversion	3.52 ± .21	50.00

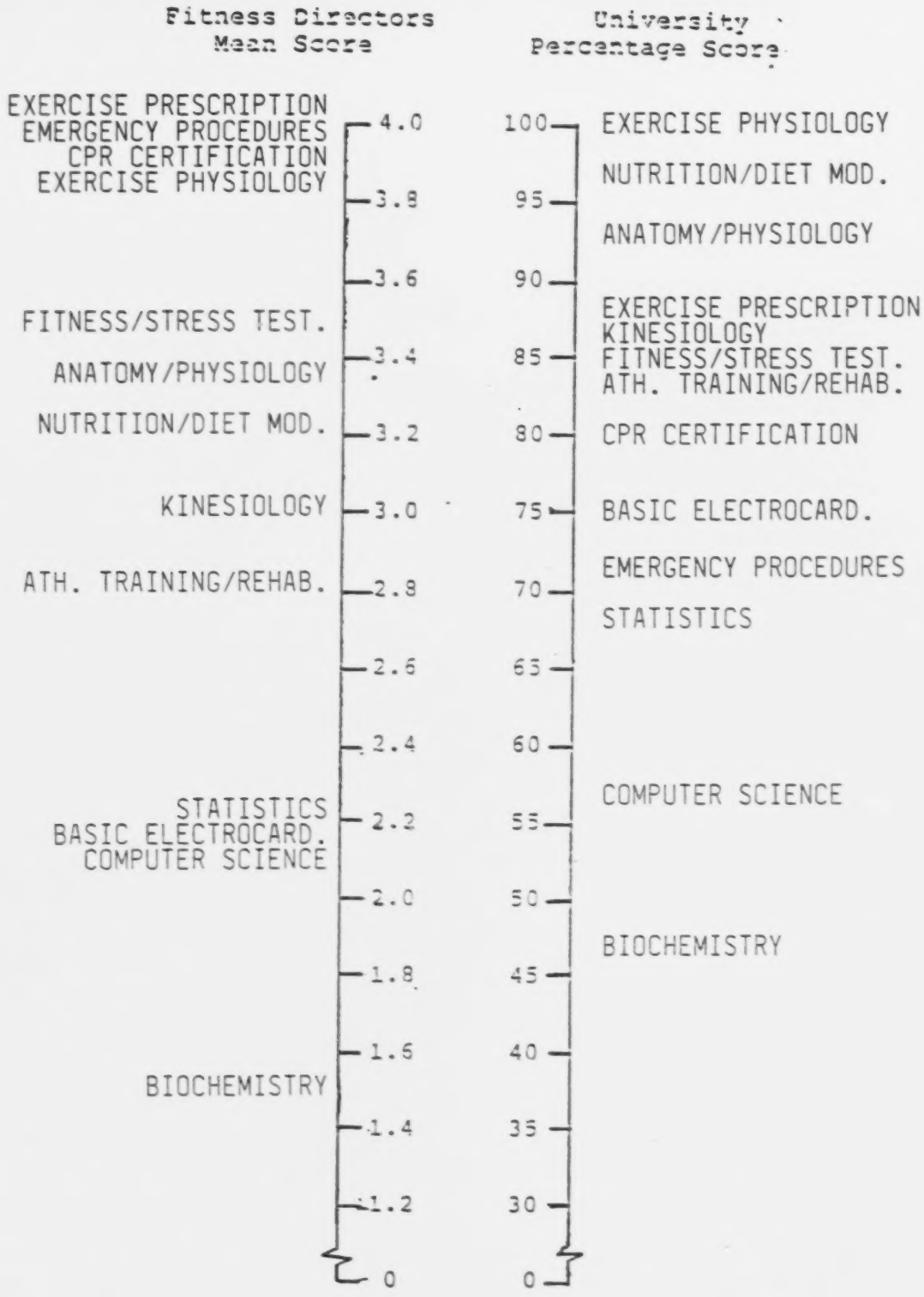

Figure 1

Comparison of Scores for Technical Knowledge Areas of Study

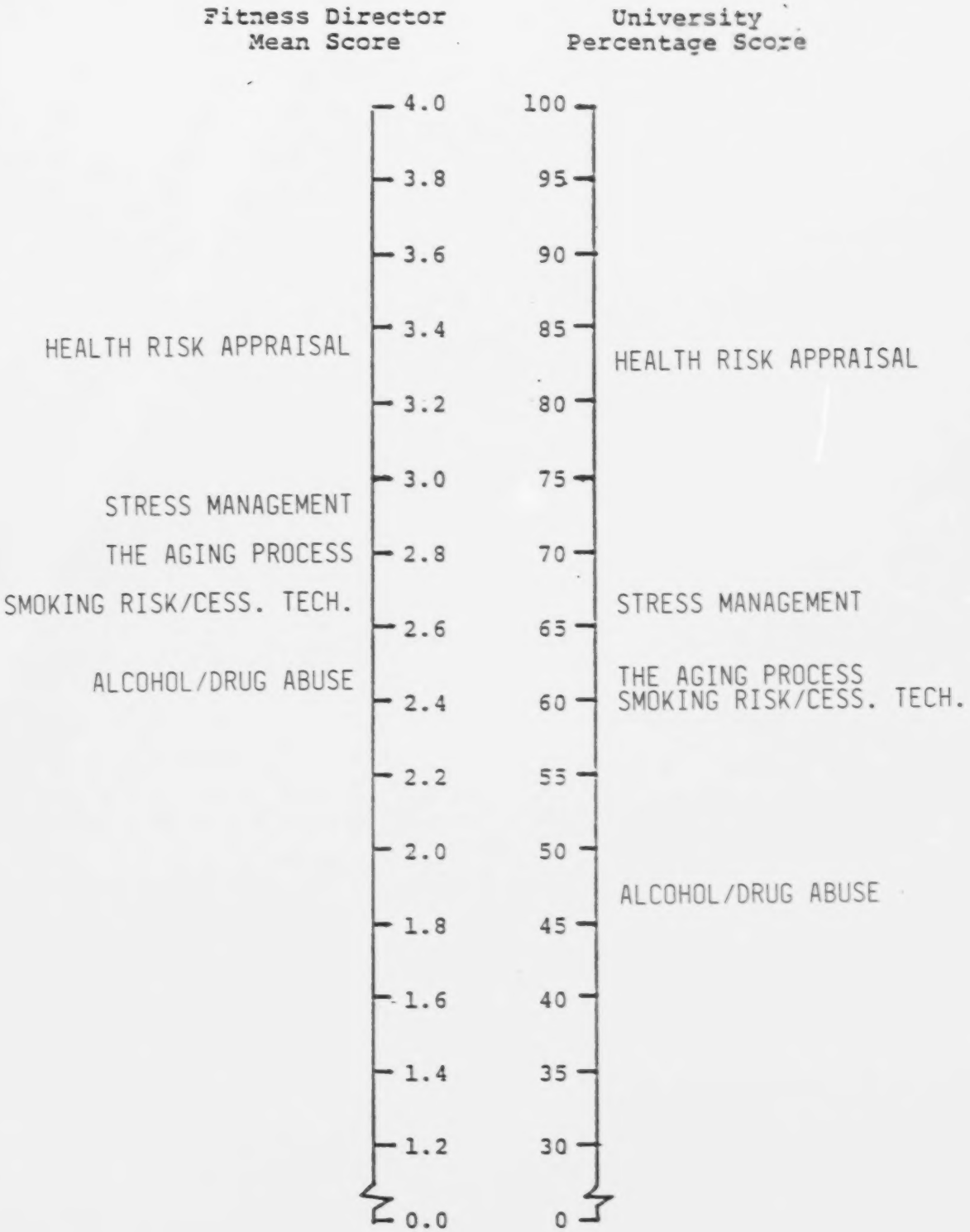

Figure 2

Comparison of Scores for General Health Knowledge Areas of Study

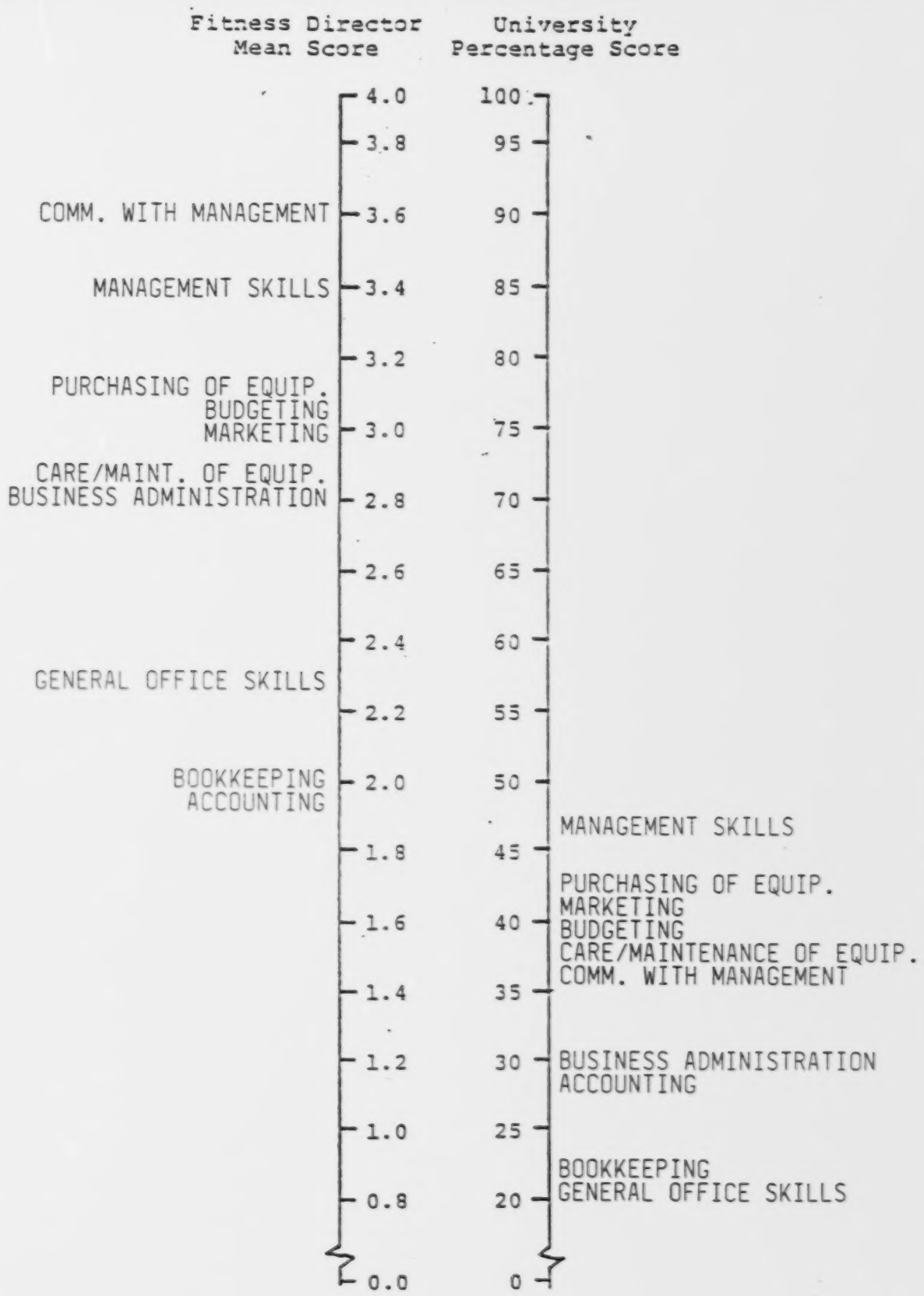

Figure 3

Comparison of Scores for Business Skills Areas of Study

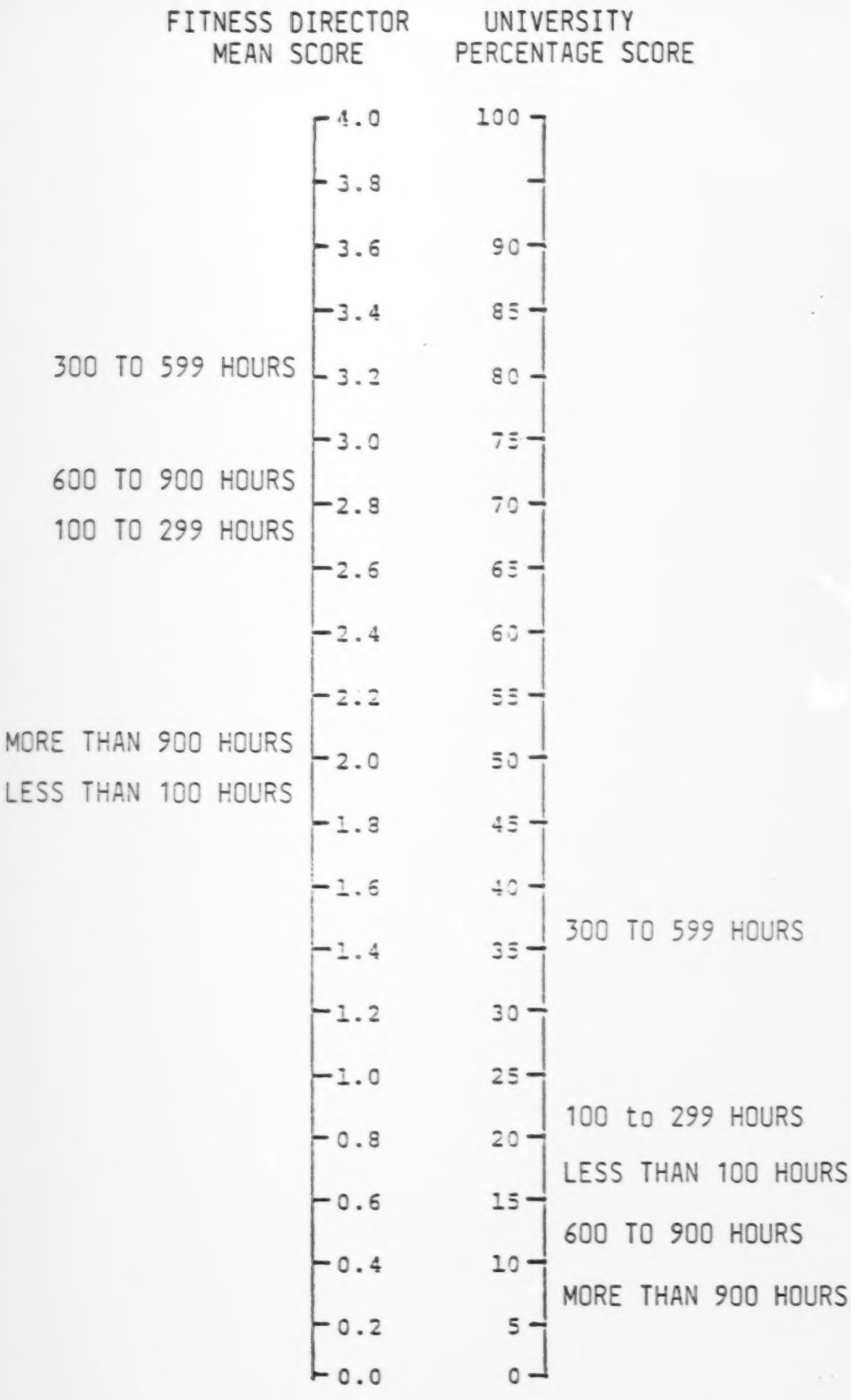

FIGURE 4

COMPARISON OF INTERNSHIP SCORES

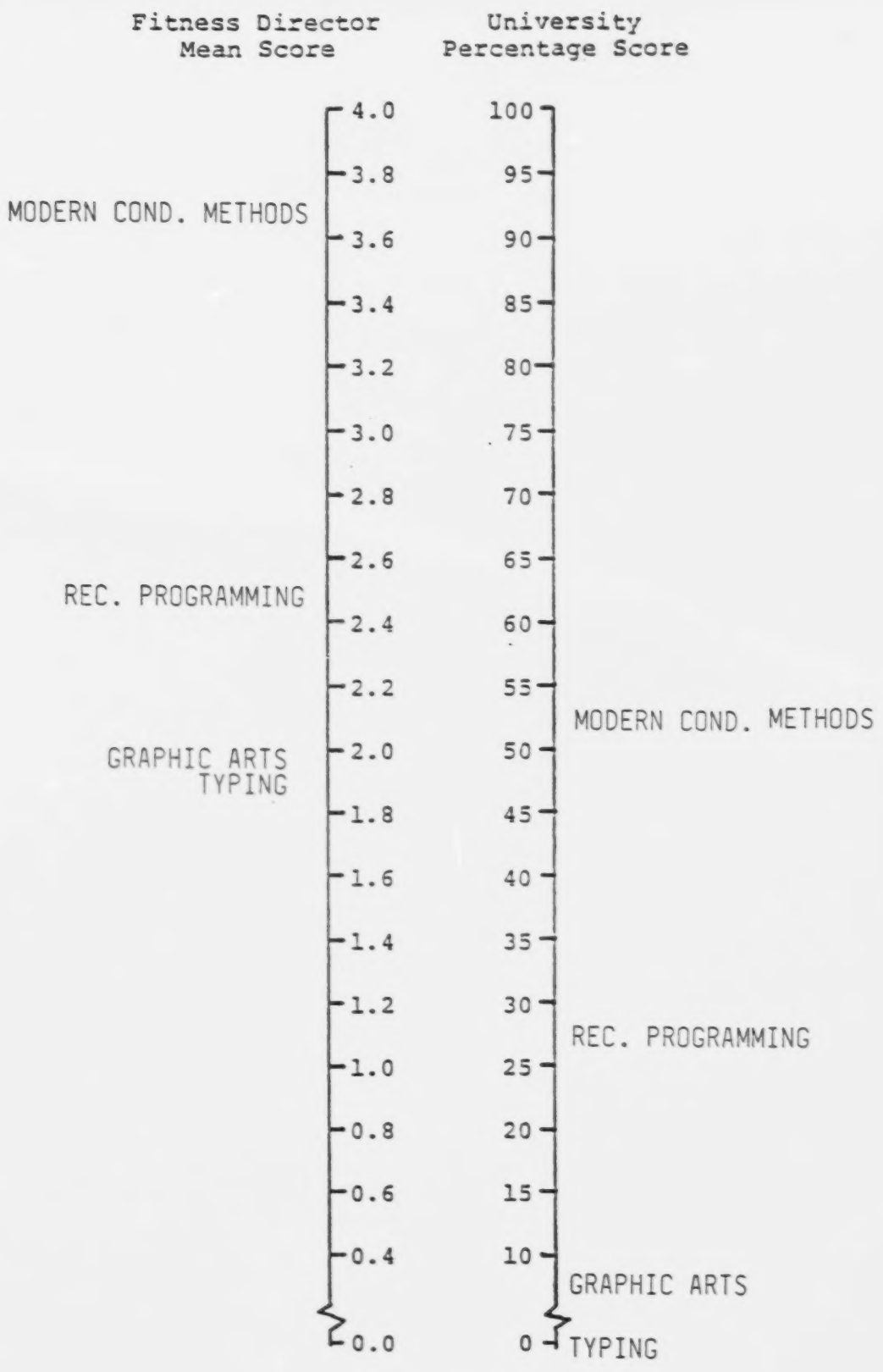

Figure 5

Comparison of Scores for Miscellaneous Areas of Study

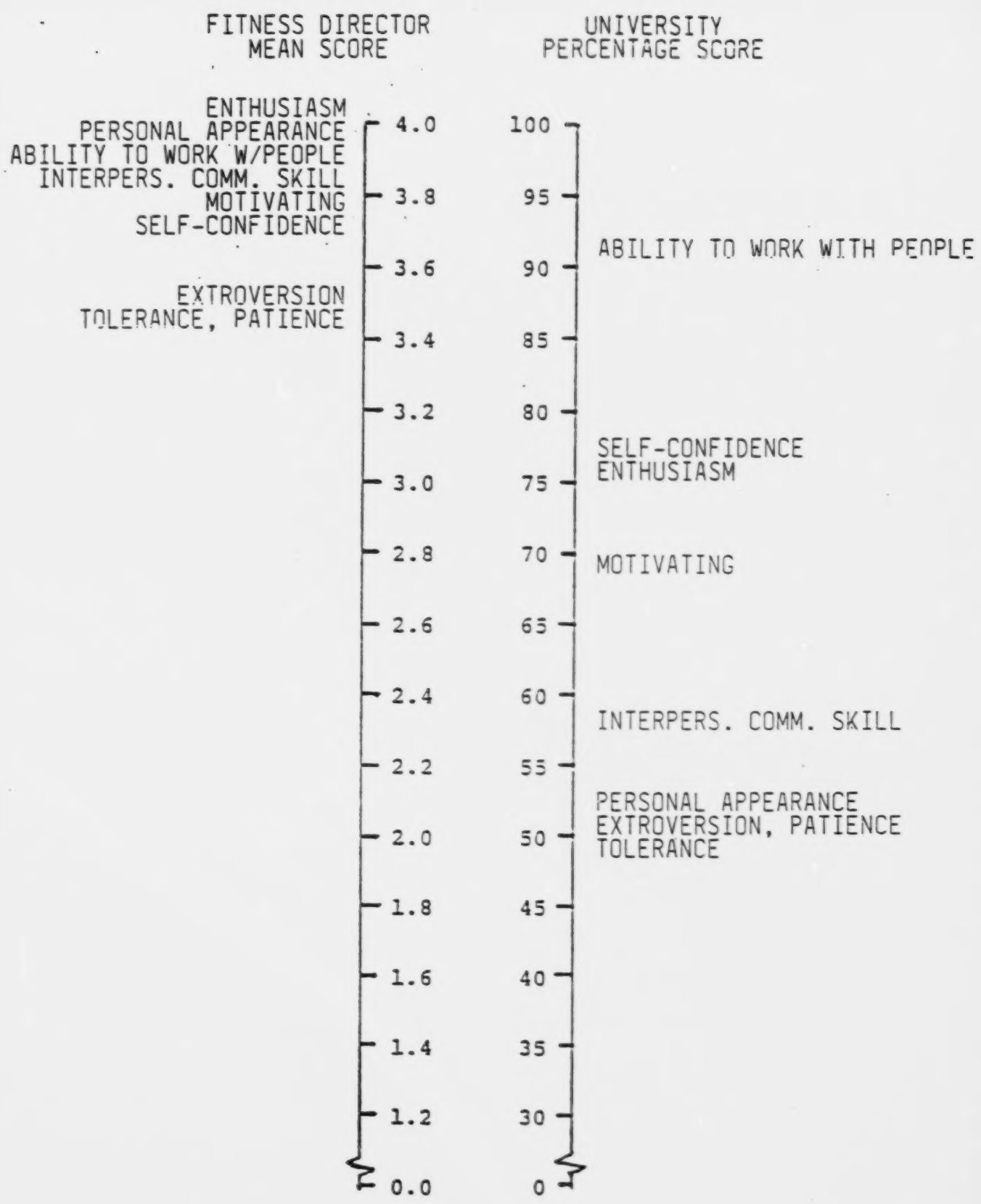

FIGURE 6

COMPARISON OF SCORES FOR PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions based on the data are as follows:

1. For the most part those Technical Knowledge course areas deemed "moderately important" to "extremely important" by corporate fitness directors are being taught/required by 70 percent or more of the universities offering formal preparation in wellness training.

2. With the exception of alcohol/drug abuse, university training in the areas of General Health Knowledge is also meeting the expectations of fitness directors. The corporate sample rated alcohol/drug knowledge as "moderately important" to "important". However, less than 50 percent of the participating institutions require this training in the programs of their graduates.

3. An investigation of Business Skills reveals that, for the most part, corporate fitness directors place a great deal more importance on this area of training than do university curriculi. Seven of the ten business courses examined were required by less than 40 percent of the university programs. Management skills, which was required by 46 percent of the university sample, received the greatest endorsement whereas training in general office skills received the least attention (19 percent).

4. When asked to "weight" the number of hours of Internship Training needed for adequate student preparation, corporate fitness directors chose 300 - 599 hours as being most conducive ("important" to "extremely important") for gaining on-the-job skills. Correspondingly, approximately 37 percent of the university programs surveyed required this amount of supervised work. The remaining 63 percent of the institutions tended to be requiring to few or to many hours of training when compared with corporate expectations.

5. Of the Miscellaneous areas of preparation examined, only training in modern conditioning methods was deemed "important" to "extremely important" by the corporate directors. Fifty-one percent of the university sample indicated that they provided this type of training in their curriculi. Recreation programming, considered "moderately important" to "important" by fitness directors was required by a mere 27 percent of the academic programs.

6. Data from the examination of the Personal Attributes category shows that with the exception of "self-confidence", "enthusiasm", and "the ability to work with people", universities neglect to promote personal attributes in students to the degree deemed "important" by corporate fitness directors. In defense of the university system it might be concluded that traditional programs are generally not organized nor structured to direct particular attention to the refinement of these traits. However it is obvious that, in the future, strategies must be devised and implemented to cultivate such personal attributes.

7. Of particular interest in the "open-ended" portion of the questionnaires was the examination of certification. Seventy-six percent of corporate fitness directors viewed certification by the American College of sports Medicine (principally as a Fitness Instructor and/or Exercise Test Technologist) as being requisite for job acquisition. Interestingly 73 percent of the responding universities reported that their programs included specific preparation, principally for these same categories. The remaining institutions made no special effort to prepare their students for this testing.

Inquiry into training and preparation provided some interesting curricular recommendations by the corporate fitness directors. Generally it was the opinion of this group that:

....internship experience in more that one setting would prove highly beneficial to the student.

....additional university emphasis on developing communicative skills (both written and verbal) was important.

....exposure to business courses such as management, administration, marketing, budgeting, planning, promotion and evaluation was highly recommended.

When asked to state the areas in which the typical entry level employee was lacking, corporate fitness directors generally agreed on the following:

....written and oral communicative skills

....business skills

....experience in working with people

....basic knowledge of corporate structure